

## Postwar Living



For the next six months it was the task of trying to readjust to post-war life that occupied both Eban and his father, Paul. Like the other displaced planters, he was anxious to get back to his plantation holdings and begin rebuilding in anticipation of future harvests. While in Moresby there was plenty of time for discussions with the other planters about the future course of the groves.

Most of the planters agreed that copra sales would soon decline, and that cacao and coffee would be the crop of the future. The labour situation was in doubt because of the wartime experiences of the natives who would be busy re-establishing their villages and re-planting their own gardens.

Paul decided that Eban should stay in Moresby while he went back to Madang. With Eban in Moresby, he would be able arrange for shipment of supplies to the plantation, and investigate the purchase of war-surplus equipment.

Eban kept his job with ANGAU in school planning, and soon became proficient in Hiri Motu, the language spoken most often on the south coast. His war-time experiences made him completely acceptable to the expatriates who made up the majority of the ANGAU staff. He visited the local missionary schools, and learned the secular methods that the mission schools operated on. He observed that there was a great demand for schools that would accept students regardless of religious or economic status.

Occasionally Eban would be able to visit his father in Madang, and also visit the mission schools in that area. The Bundaberg plantation was not in good shape when Paul returned.

The groves suffered not only from neglect, but from the ravages of war. Nuts were laying on the ground rotting, and the buildings housing offices and supplies had deteriorated to the extent that some of them would best be abandoned and rebuilt in another location. As the government store had not yet reopened there was no incentive for the labourers to work outside their own villages.

The town of Madang was slowly rebuilding, and the large dumps of military equipment were being dispersed. Paul managed to buy two trucks, and a supply of petrol as well as two Japanese tractors that were in sorry shape but could be salvaged to make one serviceable unit. Scrounging for spare parts and tools became a local preoccupation largely overlooked by the local administration.

By the end of 1946 things had settled down a bit, and the administration in Moresby began serious plans for the establishment of a school system for all of the provinces that were not adequately served by the mission schools.

English was established as the official language and Pidgin as the commercial language. The Australian administration was greatly expanded, and there was less need for the traditional Kiap of the pre-war regime.

Many of the natives had learned a rudimentary English and Japanese, and some tribes had during the war years their first contact with the white man, generally described as "Europeans".

The expatriate population was greatly increased by traders and opportunists who became aware during the war of the great amount of natural resources in Papua and New Guinea. Even the Japanese recognised the potentials of the Island group, and were said to be negotiating trade agreements for timber and agricultural products.

On the north coast, and some of the islands, a good number of natives were disappointed that the Australian government would continue to be in charge. Contact with the Americans had pointed out a great difference in the two countries philosophy in the handling of the native population.

The Australians had frequently been harsh in their treatment of the natives, and contemptuous of them as an "inferior race". The Americans on the other hand treated the natives well, and were generous and more tolerant of native customs.

Like the Germans before them, the Australians considered the natives as a commodity to be exploited the same as the other resources of the island. A more benign attitude of the post-war administration was called for as now New Guinea was under direct scrutiny of the outside world. As 1947 drew to a close, there was no question of returning to the pre-war view of the people of Papua and New Guinea.

The Department of Education was pushing construction of a campus outside of Boroko for a primary and secondary school with boarding facilities and a clinic and expanded office space.

Help for the construction was supplied by the army engineers and a lot of building supplies were available from surplus. Practically speaking, the only imports would be the teachers recruited from Queensland where the climate was similar to that of Moresby.

Eban worked on curriculum planning for the secondary school, where the enrolment was projected to be 60% native and 40% European. It was assumed that most of the students would have a working knowledge of English, and had a primary education. It was also assumed that all of the students would speak pidgin to varying degrees, as well as their native language. Special classes in Pidgin were also planned for the new teachers, but kept in abeyance till the schools were in operation.

Eban still lived in the apartment hotel along Ela Beach road, only a short distance from the present headquarters of the Department of Education. Some of his father's old cronies lived there too, and the public rooms were still the meeting place for nightly discussions now focused on how the peace was going.

The old group was supplemented by a number of recently arrived expatriates working for various government agencies. It was mostly a man's world with competition being keen for any chance to meet any of the few women in the area.

The military, of course, had access to the service clubs where Nurses, WAAF's and Land Army women tended to congregate, while the administration workers were able to be in contact with only the small number of females now employed. As the schools had not yet opened, female teachers were still only a dream.

Eban worked closely with Les Jones, the supervising principal of the schools, as it became obvious that Eban was the "Resident Expert" on Pidgin and the other native languages. Jones had been schooled in Hiri Motu, and had only a smattering of ability in Pidgin.

He and Eban got together frequently on a social basis and exchanged ideas about the embryo school system. Jones asked Eban to be his assistant when the schools opened, because of Eban's experience in dealing with the business end of the Bundaberg Plantation.

Eban threw himself into the work of getting the new school in shape for the arrival of the new teachers, some of whom had already arrived in Moresby and were living in a school-owned dorm further down on Ela Beach road. He hadn't met any of the staff as yet, but had all of their personnel records in a file in his office.

When the school opened and the students were in place, Eban was swamped with administrative work and had little time to do any more than attend meetings with Jones and

the senior staff as well as the Department of Education administrators. Finally an open house tea was arranged for the parents to meet the teachers and staff, and he was able for the first time to see the new teachers in their classrooms.

Principal Jones asked him to meet with the individual teachers in order to make sure class assignments were proper and that input from the teachers would uncover any weaknesses in the curriculum.

Most of the teachers had more classroom experience than he had, and he was quite attentive to their comments and questions. One teacher, Molly Mallone, asked for help with her study of Pidgin, and he offered to lend her some recent dictionaries that he had obtained from the Allied forces.

A few weeks later, at a dance in the Officers Club at Jackson's Drome, he met Molly again, and was intrigued by her obvious desire to learn more about New Guinea and its people. He invited her to join him on a visit to one of the nearby native villages, and was pleased when she accepted his invitation.

Since leaving school in Brisbane, he had lived in a man's world, and he hoped he wouldn't be awkward with Molly as he had very little contact with women in the past.

He arranged to borrow a car from one of the other men at ANGAU, and spoke to the district officer about the village and its location. He found that he was very much looking forward to spending a day with Molly Mallone.